A Bond of Perseverance

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A Bond of Perseverance

by SaitouLover

Summary

She had been flitting in the background like a night-butterfly, unsure of her place in Will's family and unwilling to speak ill of Hannibal if it meant risking what she had.

Notes

This is not A/B/O. Here, it’s normal for men to be able to carry as well... just far less common. I’m thinking that for every 1000 female pregnancies there’s one male pregnancy. Enough that it would turn some heads but not enough to be considered freakish. Heterosexual pregnancies are still the overwhelming majority because the majority of men who can carry are straight. It can take people by surprise because men don’t have external menstruation like women.

Will grew up in a time and place where it wasn’t openly acceptable, and so doctors and schools didn’t screen for the ability. Things have changed since then but Will never felt the need to get himself checked.

"So, what do you think?"

Abigail turned from where she was staring out the window, looking down into the overrun garden below. She glanced around the empty room they were in before she shrugged and crossed her arms over her stomach, eyes not meeting Will's. It screamed discomfort and Will bit back a sigh.

"It's nice," Abigail said, picking up on Will's growing disappointment. "I guess."

Will gave in and did sigh at that. "You guess."

The teenager winced and looked back out the window without another word and the empath observed her for a long moment before he carefully moved to her side. He rested beside her at the window, staring at the trees below until she made a discontented sound. She brushed her hair behind her ear, the one that remained, and glanced at him quickly. When she looked back through the panes of glass, she frowned and bit her lip in agitation.

"I don't get it," she said quietly after a minute of uncomfortable silence.

Will knew what she meant, the question that was stuck in her brain.

It was clear to him that she wasn't adjusting to freedom as well as he had hoped she would, the long months spent under Hannibal's hand leaving damage that was now slow to mend. Hannibal had made admirable progress in breaking and reshaping her but his work had been interrupted, only partially completed when he lovingly released her into Will's care. The half-metamorphosis was precarious and it was a delicate balancing act on Will's part to gently encourage her out of Hannibal's mold and back into her original form.

"Hannibal is a monster," Will said quietly, trying to answer her question as best he could, keeping his gaze outside and away from the young woman standing beside him. "And like most monsters, it's not in his nature to love."

He ran a finger over the cold glass in front of him. "But it's not impossible, he just has to be taught."

Abigail grimaced and hugged her middle tighter, not saying a word. Will let her think on his words for a couple minutes, most likely applying them to her father as well. Fingers ran over the old caulk between the panes and eventually he turned around and leaned back against the window frame. He passed a critical eye over the room, trying to recognize all the work that he'd been told was needed before anyone could move into it.

They were in the guesthouse Will had chosen, the one he had discussed with Hannibal over a month ago when he'd still been pregnant with BG. Hannibal had trudged down with him and Celeste one afternoon the previous week to examine it personally, inspecting it with his veiled snobbery that sometimes - most of the time - set his teeth on edge. The house was deemed acceptable but both the doctor and Celeste had immediately began discussing

renovations and floor plans and Will had been left staring at the space around him in confusion, wondering why they would want to change anything.

Will dragged himself out of the memory and glanced back to the young woman standing beside him before looking away again. Abigail had been happy to see him, glad even, when he returned from the hospital; but the awkwardness, the fear, slowly trickled back after their initial reunion. Hannibal was a lurking presence around them, even when he was in Baltimore or D.C.. His influence ran deep in both of them, in different fashions, and it was clear Abigail was unbalanced by the dual-emotions the killer had nurtured in her.

"I honestly think Hannibal was trying to do what he thought was best for you," he said eventually before he scoffed and slid his eyes sideways to the teen. "He failed spectacularly, but sometimes you have to take what you can get."

"He cut off my ear," Abigail bit out, startling Will with the harshness that had been staunchly buried the past three weeks she been with him. She had been flitting in the background like a night-butterfly, unsure of her place in Will's family and unwilling to speak ill of Hannibal if it meant risking what she had.

Will nodded, easy acceptance of not only what was said but the hostility towards Hannibal left unvoiced. "And he fed it to me."

Abigail swallowed in sympathy at the image Will's statement invoked and turned to him, her eyes filled with conflict. "Then why?"

It was difficult to ignore the plea in her voice, the unspoken need for Will to just make everything right in her world once again, and he forced himself to meet her gaze.

"Hannibal is a necessary evil."

Young blue eyes scrunched in confusion and Will sighed.

"You and I want the exact same thing, Abigail. And, at the end of the day, he's the best chance we have at getting and keeping it."

Understanding blossomed on her face and Abigail glanced down at Will's stomach before she met his eyes once again. Will gave her a pleased nod and tapped his middle where the cesarean incision was still healing.

"You and me, our first instinct isn't to murder to get what we want. We manipulate, we plot and plan." Will forced as much meaning into his tone as possible. "We survive the monsters."

It was quiet for quite a while after that, both of the room's occupants leaning against the window frame in quiet contemplation. Abigail worried her lip again and Will let her work out her thoughts on her own, content to allow her the time she needed. He looked down the hallway, eyes passing the numerous doors on either side of it, and stared at the old oak staircase that led down to the first floor of the house.

"He'd never have let us go."

It was a quiet murmur, mostly to herself, but Will acknowledged it all the same. "No, he wouldn't have."

Abigail shifted uncomfortably and hugged herself tighter. "Now?"

"Not now either. But in the future."

"You trust him too much."

Will chuckled. "No, Abigail. I trust myself."

He turned toward her, leaning against the wall with his left shoulder, and he crossed his arms and smiled gently. "Hannibal is capable of a great deal more than most other monsters. He just has to be taught how to do it, or the closest he can get. Why do think you're here?"

The teen scowled and looked away. "Because it's an easy way of keeping control."

"Yes," Will acknowledged, "but that's a need that's so ingrained in him that he can't change it. It's also not the main reason."

Abigail shrugged, discomfort in her posture and Will sighed and stepped in front of her. He carefully placed his hands on her shoulders, ignoring how they stiffened beneath his touch, and waited until she looked up at him. When she did, he smiled kindly and moved to cup her face with his hand, the tips of his fingers landing on the ruin that had been her ear before Hannibal entered her world.

"Hannibal is lonely, just like us. He tried to force things in his favor and made a right mess of it. What he did, it doesn't excuse him and I don't blame you for not forgiving him."

Will squeezed the shoulder he was still touching. "But when it comes down to it, you and I have specific needs and wants that most people can't meet. We want back what we lost and there's nothing wrong with that. But there's darkness in us that tints anything we touch and there's few options available. Hannibal, while dangerous, is the best option we have."

Abigail sucked on her bottom lip for a moment before she shook her head, dislodging Will's hand. "For you, maybe, but what about me? I'm just... just..."

"You're my daughter," Will admitted bravely when she trailed off. He continued on when her blue eyes widened in surprise. "I don't care what you consider me, a father or brother or even just a friend, but you mean everything to me. I love you just as much as I do BG and I will never allow anyone to hurt you like that again, especially not Hannibal."

"But you wouldn't be able to stop him," she whispered faintly, muted terror filtering into her tone.

"Yes, I would," Will comforted. "Besides, he knows better than to try. Hannibal wants this family just as much as I do and he would lose it in a heartbeat if he did anything to jeopardize it. And that's if Celeste or I didn't kill him first. I won't stand for his particular brand of curiosity and meddling anymore. If he wants to wind someone up, then it's going to be someone else."

They lapsed into a thick silence after that, neither one knowing how to move past the tension that had built during the past few minutes. Eventually Abigail sighed, her shoulders sagging, and she leaned forward to rest her forehead against Will's shoulder. Will lifted his arms and gently held her, his head dipping to rest a cheek against her hair.

"He loves you," he whispered. "As much as he's capable of right now. He's closer to BG and always will be, but you're as much his daughter as Braelyn is. It's just going to be a learning curve for him. I'm not suggesting you trust him, or forgive him, but please trust me. Hannibal won't hurt us again."

"How do you know?" Abigail whispered back.

"Because he promised me and I have to believe in that. If not, then I'm going to have to kill him and I'd really rather not put myself through that."

She was quiet for a full minute before she spoke again, her voice sounding positively wretched. "I miss my dad."

Will turned his head slightly and placed a kiss on top of her scalp. "I know."

Abigail reached up and twisted her hands in Will's shirt, wrinkling the fabric with fine tremors. "He killed those girls because of me and I still miss him!"

"He killed those girls because he loved you too much to do the same to you. What he did was wrong but that doesn't diminish your feelings for him. Look at me and Hannibal. After everything he's done, I still want him beside me. How we feel about people can't be controlled by should-be's or wishful-thinking. We feel what we feel and there's no shame in that. You're allowed to love your father, Abigail, even if you can't forgive him."

Abigail gave a short bark of a sob before she pulled away and wiped at her face furiously, trying to fool both Will and herself into thinking she wasn't crying. Will let her, knowing that they'd have to revisit this particular trauma before the teen could rest easier with Garrett Jacob Hobbs' memory. He moved back to stare out the window, trying to identify the edges of the garden and the beginning of what should be the back yard. Finally, there was one last sniff behind him and Will felt Abigail move to stand beside him again.

"I like it," she admitted finally, quietly. "The house."

Will smiled. "But not the room."

The young woman hesitated before she shook her head. "I don't like seeing all the trees."

And that made some sense to Will, probably too much of a reminder of Hobbs' cabin.

"There are other rooms, with other views." The empath shrugged his shoulders. "Or you can stay with Celeste. I'm sure she'd be delighted to have the company up at the hotel."

"Can we... Can we look at that one room again? The one in the front?"

Will smiled at the uncertainty. "Of course. And if you decide you like it, we can go furniture shopping this weekend. Pick out things you like."

Abigail nodded and hesitated, making Will stop to look back at her. She stared at the floor for a moment before she straightened her shoulders and met Will's curious gaze with her own, forced mischief dancing in her blue eyes.

"Maybe," she started. "Maybe put Hannibal's credit card to use."

The suggestion took a second to register but when it did Will laughed and held out an arm to her. She slid under it and he gave her shoulder a fond squeeze as he maneuvered them down the hall and towards the bedroom in the front of the house.

"I'm sure it could use the exercise." He wiggled the fingers of his free hand at her. "Did I ever mention that I worked a stint in the robbery division? My old boss said 'sticky fingers are always catching.'"

Abigail giggled once she understood the joke and covered her mouth with a hand. She sighed and leaned her head against Will's shoulder. "I like green."

"A lovely color," the empath said indulgently. "I'm sure we can find paint and bedding you'll like."

"Will?"

"Yes?"

Abigail pulled her head away and looked up at him. "Thank you, for saving me."

Will frowned. "You thanked me long time ago for that."

She went to respond but seemed to change her mind because she shrugged and gave him a half-smile.

"Never mind," she said.

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